

# THE BOARD MEMBER'S RESPONSIBILITY AND THE IMAGE HE MUST MAINTAIN\*

by

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When a member of a county Farm Bureau is elected by his fellow members to a position on the board of trustees, he faces a two-fold challenge: (1) to represent the members and (2) he is vested by law with the responsibility to reasonably conduct the affairs of the business for the welfare of the county Farm Bureau. As a board member, he has legal and general responsibilities in representing members of the Farm Bureau.

Your county Farm Bureau board members' manual does an excellent job of presenting for you valuable information about the Farm Bureau, what it is, how and what it provides for members, and suggestions as to how you can discharge your responsibilities with dispatch.

What does the word responsibility mean? Webster says, "Responsibility is a charge for which one is responsible or accountable." A definition of responsibility that I like to use is, "Responsibility is the obligation of an individual to carry out assigned activities to the best of his ability."

The board of trustees itself is, in reality, a committee--a top-level decision-making committee. As a committee elected by the membership, the members of the board of trustees share full responsibility for making over-all policy decisions and are by law accountable to the membership.

The acceptance of an obligation by an individual to perform work or carry out assignments creates his responsibilities. Therefore, when the member of the Farm Bureau who has been elected a trustee accepts the position, he implies that he recognizes the responsibility of the position and will discharge these responsibilities to the best of his ability.

A board of trustees is the governing body of a corporation legally created under state statutes and issued a "charter". The state statutes give the trustee authority to exercise the powers of the corporation, limited only by any conditions set forth in the corporations code of regulations.

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All the corporate powers of an association, other than those specifically conferred upon members are vested in its trustees. In general, it is the responsibility of trustees to direct and supervise in a fundamental way the activities of the association.

#### Board Acts as a Group

It must always be remembered that the board of trustees' decisions are group decisions. The board is a group; it acts jointly as a board. It never acts as an individual. Opinions and actions result from the contributions of all the persons making up the board. The actions of a board of trustees are conditioned by the background, experience, knowledge and attitude of its collective membership. In fact, it is the abilities and the application of these abilities of the individuals who make up the board of trustees that is the real decisive factor in the growth and accomplishment of any organizations.

To many, you are the Farm Bureau. Farm Bureau is on exhibit in your words and actions.

#### Objective

You, a County Farm Bureau Trustee, are in a position comparable to the organizers of your association 56 years ago. You have the responsibility of charting the course your Farm Bureau will travel across the unexplored sea of future time. Thanks to the early Farm Bureau leaders you have a "star" to guide you--your trustees' manual reminds you that the principle objective of Farm Bureau is: "To increase Farm Income and Improve Rural Standards of Living."

The objective of any association is its statement of purpose which defines what the members believe to be the firm's mission. As a trustee, you have agreed to direct your efforts and talents toward the attainment of this objective by the Farm Bureau.

#### A Board Member's Position is one of Trusteeship

It is difficult to define all the responsibilities of the board of trustees. Page 3 of your manual does an excellent job of listing many of your formal responsibilities.

#### Trustees Represent Members - Not Themselves

Each trustee will be challenged by vested interests of his own or friends and neighbors. I, for example, as a Farm Bureau member have a great appreciation for the Farm Bureau youth program because of the many opportunities I received from it. I might put all my efforts towards

getting the entire Farm Bureau board to put all its money and efforts in this one area and forget the rest. Because of my special interest I would suggest that we add one other program under item 4--and I think it should be at the top of the list--Farm Bureau Youth! I would point out that while one cannot accurately measure Farm Bureau's return from an outstanding youth program, I think that the resources devoted to Farm Bureau Youth over the years has brought about great returns. I would also point out that the Farm Bureau Youth program has for many years provided the only organized cooperative educational program for youth we have had in Ohio. In fact, the Farm Bureau Youth program has been so good, we seem to just assume it will always be there.

But this is only one type of special interest that trustees will encounter. Some board members may have a vested interest in a special interest such as the women's program. A board member may feel they were elected by the women's program to "look out for" the women's program - or any special segment. As a board member you cannot turn off all but your special interest.

Trustees need to recognize that the success of a county Farm Bureau depends largely upon the County Board of Trustees developing and executing an effective balanced program to meet the needs of members and agriculture.

A county Farm Bureau Board member may say, "but the state doesn't recommend it". Now at that point I am really on! I point out that the Ohio Farm Bureau is a Federation of County Farm Bureaus (page 6 of the manual)--prescribing its own program.

The facts are that the members of the County Farm Bureau elected you to a trusteeship and in doing so they legally placed their personal and financial interests in the Farm Bureau in your hands. However, they have established some very definite limits within which you are to function. The code of regulations is in fact your directions from the members as to how to operate the County Farm Bureau. To further guide you, they established each year policies to guide your official actions.

You have then a responsibility to listen to me as a member and suggest that I take my concern through the proper procedures that have previously been established to insure that all members and their views can be heard and considered. So you can advise me that my best recourse is to discuss the Farm Bureau Youth program in my local advisory council and at the next annual meeting.

The established objective and annual policies determined by the membership can be important aids to you in handling special or vested interest questions. You, as a director, must know the code of regulations of your county Farm Bureau. You must know and understand the policies adopted by the members at the last annual meeting.

## Opportunities

Those farsighted men and women who promoted the Farm Bureau were courageous leaders and provide the optimism, courage, and foresight necessary to motivate others to get involved and work to establish an organization of farmers to work together to increase farm income and improve rural standards of living.

Today, you, as a trustee of your county Farm Bureau, have some equally challenging issues to face: pollution; industrialization; urban, rural and suburban population trends; increased service demands; expansion; finance; taxes; etc. As "involved" trustees you are participating in clinics and workshops designed to assist you to more effectively discharge your responsibilities. There is no Farm Bureau Trustee of the past who had problems of the same magnitude or any more challenging than the ones that you face today.

At the corner of Seventh & Pennsylvania Avenues in Washington, D. C. stands the National Archives Building which houses our great historical documents. Two plaques greet the visitors from succeeding generations to this building. The plaque on the left says, "Study the past." The plaque on the right says, "What is past is prologue." This can be interpreted as "what is past is only the introduction" or "what is past is only the beginning". To put this into 1972 language, we can say what is past is "our launching pad". It takes courage to look ahead. It takes optimistic leaders with a vision to motivate others to change.

If we were to select 12 from this group to be on a committee to examine this land of ours, this country of ours, and to assess it and to evaluate the outlook of our country and of our land and its industry and its agriculture and the Farm Bureau, do you suppose the committee's report would be one of confidence and optimism; or would it be one of doubt and pessimism? Today, it seems to be popular to be against our country, our standard of living and our successful businesses.

If you were on this committee to take a look into the future, would your report be that Farm Bureau has a bright future, that this nation of ours has a bright future? Or would you have to report that we have reached a pinnacle and have begun to decline? Or would you say, "What is past is prologue" - that is - we are only at the introduction of a greater tomorrow?

This type of committee has been used on various occasions. One of which was 3,300 years ago. I would like to make a brief analogy of that committee's report with the possibility of such a committee that we might select here today.

For a more detailed report on the committee, you can read Chapters 13 and 14 of the Book of Numbers.

In Numbers 13, we find that there was a twelve man committee that

spent 40 days investigating the land of Canaan, analyzing the people, its resources, its military inclinations, its agriculture and any opportunities it held for the individual recognition and success.

The committee's final report revealed that 10 of the 12 members were totally demoralized and pessimistic about the country saying it was a land controlled by big men. There was no opportunity for the individual.

We have people today - maybe even some of our hypothetical committee - those who say that American is in the hands of big business but this is nothing new. Some may even say Farm Bureau is in the hands of a few old-timers who have lost contact with their members.

About 1930 there were two national studies made that showed farmers would never use enough electricity to pay for the lines. But as you know, a few leaders like yourself were optimistic and with about \$140,000 of Farm Bureau dues they started Rural Electric Cooperatives.

All the members of the twelve man committee of 3,300 years ago are listed in Numbers 13. We have trouble recalling the names of the ten pessimists. However, most of you know the names of Joshua and Caleb, the optimists.

You know the names of the optimistic men of the early days of Farm Bureau. Did you ever stop to realize that we do not erect monuments to pessimists or complainers but to optimistic "idea people". You have a great reservoir of "idea people" in your organization. You must involve them.

I once heard that in most groups, 10% of the people are innovators or willing to move ahead, willing to stick their neck out and promote a new idea and that 80% of the people can be led to go along with most any idea and that there are usually about 10% of the members of any group who are against any given idea. Are you giving leadership to the 10% that are innovators? Is your county Farm Bureau taking advantage of skills, abilities, and ideas of the innovative 10% of the human resource or is your Farm Bureau content to employ its members involvement efforts to oppose the 10% against any given idea.

Whether you realize it or not, we are at a point where we must decide whether we will be content to rest on the accomplishments of those fore-sighted leaders of the past who built Farm Bureau into the successful organization it is today, or whether we will meet the challenge of the times and adjust our viewpoints and look ahead to meet the dynamic economy of today and the anticipated demands of tomorrow.

In the lifetime of most of us in this room, we - farmers, researchers and educators have:

Taken disease and bacteria out of milk  
Taken the fat and toughness out of meat

Taken the squeeze out of oranges and put the juice on the breakfast table 365 days a year  
Taken the chickens out of the back yard  
Taken worms out of corn, apples, etc.  
Taken the peel off the potatoe  
Taken the bread out of the oven  
Emancipated women from a daylong work duty in the kitchen  
Made tomatoes available everyday  
Removed the farmer from the end of a pitchfork and put him on the business end of a pencil and a computer  
Removed the farmer from the dust of the hay mow, the cold wet fodder shock in a muddy field to the comfort cab of the combine  
Removed the farmer from the dust behind a team of horses and put him in the air-conditioned cab of a tractor  
Taken the hoe from the hand of the farm wife and replaced it with the steering wheel of a car so she can drive to the supermarket  
Taken the chicken feathers from the farm wife's hair and replaced it with the latest hairdo  
Taken the cows foot from the bucket and given the farmer's wife a friendly milkman  
Made farming a respectable occupation

What lies ahead for agriculture is dependent upon what today's and tomorrow's agricultural leadership are willing to put into it. What you are willing to put into Farm Bureau in the form of time, leadership and vision

I personally believe we have made a tremendous error in our educational programs. We have been so possessed with the science of production that we have neglected the training of two generations in marketing or the agribusiness side of agriculture. Next we have failed to involve these young people in our agribusinesses and farm organizations. The young farmers trained in production agriculture do not understand agribusiness or marketing and are therefore reluctant to "get involved". Since the young farmers don't understand the off farm economic activities, older farmers are reluctant to involve them in agribusinesses. We must remind ourselves that most of our cooperatives were started by young farmers. I hope you have and are involving young farmers and their wives in your organization. If you are already involving them, then you know how much vigor and enthusiasm these young couples can give your organization.

We must each, as trustees and agricultural leaders, recognize our reluctance to change. We all feel more secure in familiar surroundings. Yet we cannot stop running if we expect to keep up. If we slow up, change will be forced on us or we will be passed by and pass our leadership to others.

It is good to take a few minutes to study the past. There is a saying that "those who do not know history are destined to live it over." We must not use history as a hitching post though. We should use it as a starting post. Our past is the launching pad for our "blast off" into the uncharted future. It takes courage to chart the course. It takes courage and an optimistic leader with vision to sell change to others.

Many of us like to look back in history at the great things Farm Bureau has accomplished, but the challenge is to look ahead and look beyond the light and see what we should do and how we should go about getting it done. It takes people like you, trustees who have the vision to look ahead, the faith to chart a course into the uncertainties of the future, the courage to lead others, the ability to motivate others to action, and the determination to get the job done. The future of Farm Bureau is what you as a trustee make it. Some one once said where there is no vision, people will perish.

At times I hear young people say, "Oh, to have lived 20 or 30 years ago and had the opportunity to help build some of our agribusiness organizations." My reply is, "If you can't see the opportunities about you today - you would not have seen them 20 years ago."

It is obvious that Farm Bureau has led the way with changes that have raised the standard of living for U. S. Farmers. Some Farm Bureaus have been creators of change as they led the way toward better farm living. Others chose to be "reactors to change" by following the innovation of others, and still other Farm Bureaus have spent their resources being "resistors to change." Your Farm Bureau can move as fast and as far as you as a trustee can lead and motivate your members.

It is your attitude, your vision, your courage, your ability to change, that will bring about increased member involvement.

As a Farm Bureau Trustee you must keep in mind that some of your members are "with you all the way - win or tie" but when you lose a round they may be quick to say, "You should have known better". You will have plenty of support when your position is popular and you must have the courage to stand alone when your cause is right but unpopular. It takes more than courage however. To be a trustee it takes vision and knowledge. To obtain the necessary vision and knowledge, trustees must devote the necessary time from their schedule to participate in meetings like this. You must set aside time to adequately collect facts, study the facts and make decisions for the Farm Bureau. In our dynamic economy, there may not be sufficient time to sufficiently ponder the question or consult members, but if you are already involved with members you will know their concerns.

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